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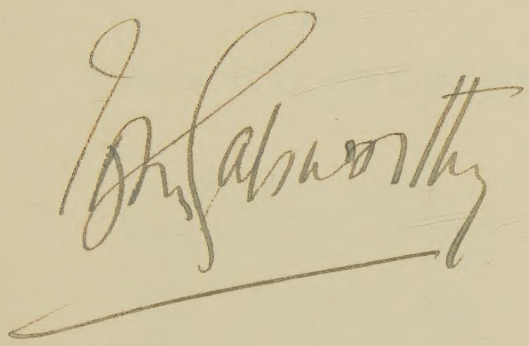
SOAMES AND THE FLAG



SOAMES AND THE FLAG

BY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

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FOREWORD

It should always be superfluous to say that the feelings and views of a character must not be confounded with those of his creator. It should be especially superfluous in the matter of this story. Soames' feelings for instance, in regard to America and the war, were doubtless those of many Englishmen, but should not be attributed to the author of his being. Soames' attitude to American intervention will be found, in fact, to be almost negative.

I remember so well reading the momentous news of that intervention in a little provincial French town, where I was on Red Cross work. I read it out to a French shopwoman, with a marvellous feeling of relief, and then noticed that it had received no response from her except a shrug.

"Don't you realise," I said, "what this means? We can't lose the war now. It's the best of all possible good news."

"Vraiment, Monsieur? Les Americains, est-ce qu'ils sont forts?"

Well, well!

JOHN GALSWORTHY

March 12, 1930: *Biarritz*

SOAMES AND THE FLAG

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CHAPTER I

On that day of 1914 when the assassinations at Serajevo startled the world, Soames Forsyte passed in a taxi-cab up the Haymarket, supporting on his knee a picture by James Maris, which he had just bought from Dumetrius. He was pleased at the outcome of a very considerable duel. The fellow had come down to his price at the last minute, and Soames had wondered why.

The reason dawned on him that night in Green Street, while reading his evening paper: 'This tragic occurrence may yet shake Europe to its foundations. Sinister possibilities implicit in such an assassination stagger the imagination.' They must have staggered Dumetrius. The fellow had suddenly seen 'blue.' The market in objects whose 'virtue' varied with the quietude of men's minds and the tourist traffic with America, was—Soames well knew—extremely sensitive. Sinister possibilities! He put the paper down and sat reflecting. No! The chap was an alarmist. What, after

all, was an archduke more or less—they were always getting into the papers, one way or another. He would see what *The Times* said about it tomorrow, but probably it would turn out a storm in a tea-cup. Soames was not, in fact, of a European turn of mind. 'Trouble in the Balkans' had become a proverb; and when a thing became a proverb there was nothing in it.

He read *The Times* journeying back with the James Maris to Mapledurham the following day. Editorial hands were lifted in the usual horror at assassination, but there was nothing to prevent him going out fishing.

Indeed, in the month that followed, even after the Austrian ultimatum had appeared, Soames, like ninety-nine per cent of his fellow countrymen, didn't know what there was 'to make such a fuss about.' To suppose that England could be involved was weak-minded. The idea, indeed, never seriously occurred to one born just after the Crimean War, and accustomed to look on Europe as fit to be advised, perhaps, but nothing more. Fleur's holidays, too, were just beginning, and he was thinking of buying her a pony: at twelve years old it was time she learned even that rather futile accom-

plishment—riding. Besides, was there not plenty of fuss in Ireland, if they must have something to fuss about? It was Annette who raised the first bubbles of an immense disquiet. Beautiful creature as she was at that period—'rising thirty-five,' as George Forsyte put it—she did not read the English papers, but she often had letters from France. On the 28th of July she said to Soames:

"Soames, there is going to be war—those Germans are crazy mad."

"War over a potty little affair like that? Nonsense!" growled Soames.

"Oh! you have no imagination, Soames. Of course there will be war, and my poor country will have to fight for Russia; and you English—what will you do?"

"Do? Why, nothing! If you're fools enough to go to war, *we* can't help it."

"We expect you to help us," said Annette; "but you English we never can rely on. You wait always to see which way the cat jump."

"What business is it of ours?" Soames answered testily.

"You will soon find what business when the Germans take Calais."

"I thought you French fancied yourselves invincible." But he got up and left the room.

And that evening it was noticed even by Fleur that he took no interest in her. All Saturday and Sunday he was fidgety. On Sunday afternoon came a rumour that Germany had declared war on Russia. Soames put it down to the papers; but he remained awake half the night, and, on reading of its confirmation in *The Times* on Monday morning, went up to town by the first train. It was bank holiday, and he went to his city club as the only spot where he might possibly get city news. He found that a good many other men were there with the same object, among them one of the partners in the firm of his brokers, Messrs. Green and Greening —more familiarly known as 'Grin and Grinning.' To him he detailed his views on the sale of certain stocks. The fellow — it was 'Grin'— regarded him askance.

"Nothing doing, Mr. Forsyte," he said. "The Stock Exchange will be closed for some days, they say."

"Closed?" said Soames. "You don't mean to say they'd let business stop, even if——"

"It will *have* to stop, or prices will flop to nothing. As it is, there's panic enough——"

"Panic!" repeated Soames, staring at his broker—'a sleek beggar!' "Cancel those orders; I shan't sell anything."

Not realising that in this he had voiced more than a personal decision, he got up and went to the window. Outside was a regular fluster. News-vendors were crying: "German ultimatum to Belgium!" Soames stood looking down at the faces in the street. It was not his custom to look at people's faces, but he did it now. One and all had a furrow between the eyes. Here was a how-de-do! Down there, on the river, he hadn't realised. And he had a sudden longing for telegraphic tape.

It was surrounded by men he did not know, and Soames, who had a horror of doing what other people were doing, and especially of waiting to do it, moved into the smoking-room and sat down. One of the least of clubmen, he literally did not know how to get into conversation with strange members, and was confined to listening to what they were saying. This was sufficiently alarming. The three or four within earshot

seemed suffering only from fear that 'this damned Government' wouldn't 'come up to the scratch.' Soames' ears stood up more and more. He was hearing more abuse of radicals and the working classes than he had ever heard in so short a space of time. The words 'traitors' and 'politicians' beat through the talk with a sort of rhythm. Though the general trend of the sentiments voiced might be his own, all that was reticent, measured and calculating within him was shocked. What did they think a war would be—a sort of water picnic?

"If we don't go in now," said one of the group, "we shall never hold up our heads again."

Soames sniffed audibly. How? He didn't see. Germany and Austria against France and Russia—if they chose to make such fools of themselves. Europe was always at war in the old days. And now that they had these thundering great armies, it was a wonder they hadn't come to loggerheads long since. What was the use of having no conscription and a big navy, if one wasn't going to keep out of war? Fellows like these! All they thought of was their dividends; and much good that would do them. If England lost her head

now, and went in, there wouldn't be any dividends. War, indeed! The whole interior of one, who for all his sixty years had been at European peace as a matter of course, rose against that grisly consummation. What had the Russians ever done, or the French for that matter, that they should expect England to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them? As for the Germans—their Kaiser was a 'cock-snoop' of a chap, always rattling his sabre, and talking through his hat—but they were at least more understandable than the Russians or the French; as to Austria—the idea of going to war with her was simply silly.

"Albert has appealed to the Powers," said a voice.

Albert! That was the King of Belgium. So he'd appealed, had he? Belgium! Wasn't she guaranteed like Switzerland? The Germans would never be fools enough to——! This was a civilised age—treaties and that. He rose. It was no use listening to jingo chatter. He would go and lunch.

But he could scarcely eat—the weather was so hot. He shouldn't be a bit surprised if that had a lot to do with the state of affairs. Put these emperors and generals and chaps on ice, and you'd have them piping

small at once. He was drinking a glass of barleywater, when he heard the waiter at the next table say to a member: "So it says, sir."

"Good God!" said the member, starting up.

Soames forgot his manners.

"What does it say?"

"The Germans have invaded Belgium, sir."

Soames put down his glass.

"Who told you that?"

"It's on the tape, sir."

Soames emitted a sound that might have come from his very boots—so deep it was. He must think. But you couldn't tell what you were thinking in this place.

"My bill," he said.

When it came, he gave the waiter a shilling against club rules and the habit of a lifetime; for he had an obscure feeling that the fellow had done something unique to him. Then, with a sudden homing instinct, he took a cab to Paddington, and all the way in the train read the evening paper, or sat staring out of the carriage window.

He said nothing when he got home—nothing whatever to anybody of what he had heard—the

whole of him absorbed in a sort of silent and awful adjustment. That fellow Grey—a steady chap, best of the bunch—must be making his speech to the House by now. What was he saying? And how were they taking it? He got into his punt and sat there listening to the wood-pigeons, in the leafy peace of the bright day. He didn't want a soul near him. England! They said the fleet was ready. His mind didn't seem able to get further than that. To be on water gave him queer consolation, as if his faith in the fleet would glide with that water down to the sea whereon the pride and the protection of England lay. He put his hand down and the water flowed green-tinged through his opened fingers. By George! There went that kingfisher—hadn't seen him for weeks—flash of blue among the reeds. He wouldn't be that fellow Grey for something. They said he was a fisherman and liked birds. What was he saying to them in there under Big Ben! The chap had always been a gentleman, could he say anything but that England would stand by her word? And for the second time Soames uttered a sound which seemed to travel up from the very tips of his toes. He didn't see what was to be done except agree with that.

And what then? All this green peace, every home throughout the land, and stocks and shares—falling, falling! And old Uncle Timothy—ninety-four. He would have to see that they kept it from the old chap. Luckily no newspaper had come into the 'Nook' since Aunt Hester died; reading about the House of Lords in 1910 had so upset Timothy, that he had given up taking even *The Times.*

'And my pictures!' thought Soames. Yes, and Fleur's governess—a German; Fleur had always spoken French with her mother. Annette would want to get rid of her, he wouldn't be surprised. And what would become of her—nobody would want a German, if there were war. A dragon-fly flew past. Soames watched it with an ache, dumb and resentful, deep within him. A beautiful summer, fine and hot, and they couldn't leave it alone, but must kick up this devil's tattoo, all over the world. This thing might—might come to be anything before it was over. He got up and slowly punted himself across. From there he could see the church. He never went to it, but he supposed it meant something. And now all over Europe they were going to blow each other to bits. What

would the parsons say? Nothing—he shouldn't wonder—they were a funny lot. Seven o'clock! It must be over by now in the House of Commons. And he punted himself slowly back. The scent of lime blossom and of meadowsweet, the scent of sweetbriar and of honeysuckle—yes, and the scent of grass beginning to cool, drifted and clung. He didn't want to leave the water, but it was getting damp.

The mothers of the boys going off to the war out there; young chaps—conscripts—Russia and Austria, Germany and France—and not one knowing or caring a dump about it. A pretty how-de-do! There'd be a lot of volunteering here—if—if——! Only he didn't know, he couldn't tell what use England could be except at sea.

He got out of the punt and walked slowly up past the house to his front gate. Heat was over, light paling, stars peering through, the air smelled a little of dust. Soames stood like some pelican awaiting it knew not what. A motor-cycle came sputtering from the direction of Reading. The rider, in dusty overalls, flung words at him:

"Pawlyment! We're goin' in!" and sputtered past.

Soames stretched out a hand. So might a blind man have moved.

Going in? With little food inside and the stars above him, all the imaginative power, which as a rule he starved, turned active, clutched and groped. Scattered, scuttling images of war came flying across the screen of his consciousness like so many wild geese over the sand, over the sea, out of the darkness into the darkness of a layman's mind; a layman who had thought in terms of peace all his days, and his days many. What a thing to happen to one at sixty! They might have waited till he was like old Timothy. Anxiety! That was it, anxiety. Kitchener was over from Egypt, they said. That was something. A grim-looking chap, with his eyes fixed beyond you like a lion's at the Zoo; but he'd always come through. Soames remembered, suddenly, his sensations during the black week of the Boer War—potty little affair, compared with this. And there was old Roberts—too old, he supposed.

'But perhaps,' he thought, 'we shan't have to fight on land.' Besides, who knew? The Germans might come to their senses yet, when they heard England

was going in. There was Russia, she had more millions than all the rest put together———. Steam-roller, they called her; but had she the steam? Japan had beaten her.

'Well!' and the thought gave him the queerest feeling, proud and miserable: 'If we begin, we shall hold on.' There was something at once terrible to him and deeply satisfying about that instinctive knowledge. They'd be singing 'Rule, Britannia!' everywhere to-night—he shouldn't wonder. People didn't *think* —a little-headed lot!

The stars burned through a sky growing blue-dark. All over Europe men and guns moving—all over the seas ships tearing along. And this silence—this hush before the storm. That couldn't last. No; there they were already—singing back there along the road—drunk, he should say. Tune—words—he didn't know them—vulgar stuff:

'It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
It's a long, long way to go . . .
Good-bye, Piccadilly!, Farewell, Leicester Square!
It's a long, long way to Tipperary,
And my heart's right there!'

What had that to do with it—he should like to

know? They were cheering now. Some beanfeast or other had got the news—common people! But—common or not, to-night it was all-England. Well, he must go indoors.

CHAPTER II

SILENCE, as of one stricken by decision, come to instinctively rather than by will, weighed on Soames that night and all next day. He read 'that chap Grey's' speech and, in conspiracy with his country, waited for what he felt would never come: an answer to the ultimatum sent. The Germans had tasted of force, and would never go back on their invasion of Belgium.

In the afternoon he could neither bear his own gloom nor the excitement of Annette, and, walking to the station, he took a train to town. The streets seemed full and to get fuller every minute. He sat down late, at the Connoisseurs Club, to dine. When he had finished a meal which seemed to stick in his gizzard, he went downstairs. From his seat in the window he could see St. James's Street, and the people eddying down it towards the centre of the country's life. He sat there practically alone. At eleven—they said—the ultimatum would expire. In this quiet room, where the furniture and wall decorations had been accumulated for men of taste throughout a century of peace, was the reality of life as he had known it; the reality

of Victorian and Edwardian England. The Boer wars, and all those other little wars, Ashanti, Afghan, Soudan, expeditionary adventures, professional affairs far away, had hardly ruffled the minds of Connoisseurs. One had walked and talked upon one's normal way, just conscious of their disagreeable necessity, and their stimulation at breakfast-time, like a pinch of Glauber salts. But this great thing—why, it had united even the politicians, so he had read in the paper that morning. And there came into his mind Lewis Carroll's rhyme:

'And then came down a monstrous crow,
As black as a tar-barrel;
It frightened both the heroes so
They quite forgot their quarrel.'

He got up and moved, restless, into the hall. All there was of connoisseur in the club was gathered round the tape—some half-dozen members, none of whom he knew. Soames stood a little apart. Somebody turned and spoke to him. A shrinking from his fellows, accentuated in Soames' emotional moments, sent a shiver down his spine. He couldn't stay here and hear chaps babbling. Answering curtly, he got his hat and went out. In the crowd he'd be alone, and he

moved with it down Pall Mall towards Whitehall. Thicker every moment, and in a curious blend of stillness and excitement. Down Cockspur Street into Whitehall he was slowly swept, till at the mouth of Downing Street the crowd became solidity itself, and there was no moving. Ten minutes to the hour! Impervious by nature and by training to mob-emotion, Soames yet was emotionalised. Here was something that was not mere mob-sensation—something made up of individual feelings stronger than mere impulse; something to which noise was but embroidery. There was plenty of noise, rumourous, and strident now and again, but it didn't seem to belong to the faces—didn't seem to suit them any more than it suited the stars that winked and waited. All sorts and conditions of men and women, and he cheek by jowl with them—like sardines in a box—and he didn't mind. Civilians, they were, peaceful folk—not a soldier or a sailor in the lot! They had begun to sing 'God save the King!' His own lips moved; he could not hear himself, and that consoled him. He fixed his eyes on Big Ben. The hands of the bright clock, halfway to the stars, crept on with incredible slowness. Two minutes

more and the thing would begin—the Thing! What would come of it? He couldn't tell, he didn't know. A bad business, a mad business—once in, you couldn't get out—you had to hold on—to the death—to the death! The faces were all turned one way now under the street lights, white faces, from whose open mouths still came that song; and then—Boom! The clock had struck, and cheering rose. Queer thing to cheer for! 'Hoora-a-ay!' *The Thing* had started! . . .

Soames walked away. Had he cheered? He did not seem to know. A little ashamed he walked. Why couldn't he have waited down there on the river, instead of rushing up into the crowd like one of these young clerks or shop fellows? He was glad nobody would know where he had been. As if it did any good for him to get excited; as if it did any good for him to do or get anything at his age. Sixty! He was glad he hadn't got a son. Bad enough to have three nephews. Still, Val was in South Africa and his leg wasn't sound; but Winifred's second son, Benedict—what age was he—thirty? Then there was Cicely's boy—just gone up to Cambridge. All these boys! Some of them would be rushing off to get themselves killed. A bad sad busi-

ness! And all because——! Exactly! Because of what?

Walking in a sort of trance he had reached the Ritz. All was fiz-gig in the streets. Waiters stood on the pavement. Ladies of the night talked together excitedly or spoke to policemen as though they had lost their profession. Soames went on down Berkeley Square through quieter streets to his sister's house. Winifred was waiting up for him, still in that half mourning for Montague Dartie, which Soames considered superfluous. As trustee, he had been compelled to learn the true history of that French staircase, if only to keep it from the rest of the world.

"They tell me war's declared, Soames. Such a relief!"

"Relief! Pretty relief!"

"You know what I mean, dear boy. One never knows what those Radicals might have done."

"This'll cost a thousand millions," said Soames, "before it's over. Over? I don't know when it'll be over—the Germans are no joke."

"But surely, Soames, with Russia and ourselves. And they say the French are so good now."

"They'd say anything," said Soames.

"But you're glad, aren't you?"

"Glad we haven't ratted, yes. But it's ruination all round. Where's your boy Benedict?"

Winifred looked up sharply.

"Oh!" she said. "But he's not even a volunteer."

"He will be," said Soames, gloomily.

"Do you really think it's as serious as that, Soames?"

"Serious as hell," answered Soames; "you mark my words."

Winifred was silent for some minutes; on her face, so fashionably composed, was a look as though someone had half drawn up its blind. She said in a small voice:

"I'm thankful dear Val has got his leg. You don't think we shall be invaded, Soames?"

"Not if they keep their heads. All depends on the fleet. They say there's a chap called Jellicoe, but you never know. There are these Zeppelins, too—I shall send Fleur down to school in the West somewhere."

"Ought one to lay in provisions?"

"If everyone does that, there'll be a shortage, and

that won't do. The less fuss the better. I shall go down home by the first train. Going to bed, now. Good-night." He kissed the forehead of a face where the blind was still half-drawn down.

He slept well, and was back at Mapledurham before noon. Fleur's greeting, and the bright peace of the river, soothed him, so that he lunched with a certain appetite. On the verandah, afterwards, his head gardener came up.

"They're puttin' off the 'orticultural show this afternoon, sir. Looks as if the Germans had bitten off more than they can chew, don't you think, sir?"

"Can't tell," said Soames. Everybody seemed to think it was going to be a picnic, and this annoyed him.

"It's lucky Lord Kitchener's over here," said the gardener, "he'll show them."

"This may last a year and more," said Soames; "no waste of any sort, d'you understand me?"

The gardener looked surprised.

"I thought——"

"Think what you like, but don't waste anything, and grow vegetables. See?"

"Yes, sir. So you think it's serious, sir?"

"I do," said Soames.

"Yes, sir." The gardener moved away; a narrow-headed chap! That was the trouble; hearts were in the right place, but heads were narrow. They said those Germans had big round heads and no backs to them. So they had, if he remembered. He went in and took up *The Times.* To read the papers seemed the only thing one could do. While he was sitting there Annette came in. She was flushed and had a ball of wool in her hand.

"Well," he said, over the top of the paper, "are you satisfied now?"

She came across to him.

"Put your paper down, Soames, and let me kiss you."

"What for?" said Soames.

Annette removed *The Times* and sank on his knees. Placing her hands on his shoulders she bent and kissed him.

"Because you have not deserted my country. I am proud of England."

"That's new," said Soames. She was a weight, and

smelled of verbena; "I don't know what we can do," he added, "except at sea."

"Oh! it is everything. We have not our backs on the wall any more; we have our backs on you."

"You certainly have," said Soames; not that it was unpleasant.

Annette rose. She stood, slightly transfigured.

"We shall beat those 'orrible Germans now. Soames, we cannot keep Fräulein, she must go."

"I thought that was coming. Why? It's not her fault."

"To have a German in the house? No!"

"Why not? She's harmless. If you send her away, what'll she do?"

"What she likes, but not in this house. Who knows—she may be a spy."

"Stuff and nonsense!"

"Oh! you English are so slow—you wait always till the fat is in the fire, as you say."

"I don't see any good in hysteria," muttered Soames.

"They will talk in the neighbourhood."

"Let them!"

"I have told her she must go. After the holiday Fleur must go to school. It is no use, Soames, I am not going to keep a German. *'À la guerre comme à la guerre!'*"

Soames uttered a sound of profound disapproval. There she went on her high horse! Something deeply just within him was offended, but something sagacious knew that if he opposed her, the situation would become impossible.

"Send her to me, then," he said.

"Do not be sloppee with her," said Annette, and went away.

Sloppy! The word outraged him. Sloppy! He was still brooding over it, when he became conscious that the German governess was in the room.

She was a tall young woman, with a rather high cheek-boned, high-coloured face, and candid grey eyes, and she stood without speaking, her hands folded one over the other.

"This is a bad business, Fräulein."

"Yes, Mr. Forsyte; Madame says I am to go."

Soames nodded. "The French have very strong feelings. Have you made any arrangements?"

The young woman shook her head. Soames received an impression of desolation from the gesture.

"What arrangements could I make? No one will want me, I suppose. I wish I had gone back to Germany a week ago. Will they let me now?"

"Why not? This isn't a seaside place. You'd better go up and see the authorities. I'll give you a letter to say you've been quietly down here."

"Thank you, Mr. Forsyte. That is kind."

"*I* don't want you to go," said Soames. "It's all nonsense; but one can't control these things"; and, seeing two tears glistening on her cheek-bones, he added hastily: "Fleur'll miss you. Have you got money?"

"Very little. I send my salary to my old parents."

There it was! Old parents, young children, invalids, and all the rest of it. The pinch! And here he was administering it. A personable young woman, too. Nothing against her except the war. "If I were you," he said slowly, "I shouldn't waste time. I'd go up before they know where they are. There'll be a lot of hysteria. Wait a minute, I'll give you money."

He went to the old walnut bureau, which he had

picked up in Reading—a fine piece with a secret drawer and a bargain at that. He didn't know what to give her—the whole thing was so uncertain. Though she stood there so quietly, he was conscious that her tears were in motion.

"Damn it!" he said, softly, "I shall give you a term's salary and fifteen pounds in cash for your journey. If they won't let you go, let me know when you come to the end of it."

The young woman raised her clasped hands.

"I don't want to take money, Mr. Forsyte."

"Nonsense," said Soames; "you'll take what I give you. It's all against my wish. You ought to be staying in my opinion. What's it to do with women?"

He took from the secret drawer an adequate number of notes and went towards her.

"I'll send you to the station. Go up and see the authorities this very afternoon; and while you get ready I'll write that letter."

The young woman bent and kissed his hand. Such a thing had never happened to him before, and he didn't know that he ever wanted it to happen again.

"There, there!" he said, and turning back to the bureau, wrote:

'Sir,

'The bearer of this, Fräulein Schmalz, has been governess to my daughter for the last eighteen months. I can testify to her character and attainments. She has lived quietly at my house at Mapledurham all the time with the exception of one or two holidays spent, I believe, in Wales. Fräulein Schmalz wishes to return to Germany, and I trust you will afford her every facility.

'I enclose my card, and am, sir,

'Faithfully yours,

'Soames Forsyte.'

He then telephoned for a car, having refused so far to have one of his own—tearing great things, always getting out of order.

When the machine arrived, he went out into the hall to wait for the young woman to come down. Fleur and a little friend had gone off to some wood or other; Annette was in the garden and would stay there, he shouldn't wonder; he didn't want the young woman to depart without a hand to shake.

First they brought down a shiny foreign trunk, then a handbag, and a little roll with an umbrella stuck through it. The young woman came last. Her eyes were red. The whole thing suddenly seemed to Soames extraordinarily barbarous. To be thrown out at a moment's notice like this because her confounded Kaiser's military cut-throats had lost their senses. It wasn't English.

"Here's the letter. You'd better stay at that hotel near Victoria until you go. Good-bye, then; I'm very sorry, but you'll be more comfortable at home while the war's on."

He shook her gloved hand, and perceiving that his own was again in danger, withdrew it hastily.

"Give Fleur a kiss for me, please, sir."

"I will. She'll be sorry to have missed you. Well, good-bye!" He was terrified that she would begin crying again, or attempt to thank him, and he added hastily: "You'll have a nice drive." As a fact he doubted it, for in fancy he could see her oozing into her handkerchief all the way.

The luggage was in now, and so was she. The car was making the usual noises. Soames, in the doorway,

lifted his hand, twiddling it towards her turned red face.

Her lip was drooping, she wore a scared expression. He gave her a wan smile, and turned back into the house. Too bad!

CHAPTER III

Rumours! Soames would never have believed that people could be such fools. Rumours of naval engagements, rumours of spies, rumours of Russians. Take, for instance, his meeting with the village schoolmistress outside the school.

"Have you heard the terrible news, Mr. Forsyte?"

Soames' hair stood up under his hat.

"No, what's that?"

"Oh! there's been a dreadful battle at sea. We've lost six battleships. Isn't it awful?"

Soames' fists clenched themselves in his pockets.

"Who told you that?"

"It's all over the village. Six ships—isn't it terrible?"

"What did the Germans lose?"

"Twelve!"

Soames almost jumped.

"Twelve! Then the war's over. What do you mean —terrible—why, it's the best news we could have!"

"Oh! but six of our own ships—it's awful!"

"War is awful," said Soames. "But if this is true

——" He left her abruptly and made for the Post Office. It was not true, of course. Nothing was true, not even his own suspicions. Take, for instance, those two square-shouldered men in straw hats whom he met walking down a lane with their feet at right angles, as Englishmen never walked. Germans, and spies into the bargain, or he was a Dutchman; especially as his telephone went out of order that very afternoon. And of course they turned out to be two Americans staying at Pangbourne on a holiday, and the wire had been affected by a thunderstorm. But what were you to think, when the newspapers were full of spy stories, and the very lightning was apparently in the German secret service. As to mirrors in daylight and matches after dark, they were in obvious communication with the German fleet in the Kiel Canal, or wherever it was. Time and again Soames would say:

"Bunkum! The whole thing's weak-minded!" Only to feel himself weak-minded the next moment. Look at those two hundred thousand Russians whom everybody was seeing in trains all over the country. They turned out to be eggs, and probably addled at that; but how could you help believing in them, espe-

cially when you wanted to? And then the authorities told you nothing; dumb as oysters; as if that were the way to treat an Englishman—it only made him fancy things. And there was Mons. They couldn't even let you know about the army, except that it was heroic, and had killed a lot of Germans, and was marching backwards in order to put the finishing touch to them. That was about all one heard, till suddenly one found it was touch and go whether Paris could be saved, and the French Government had packed their traps and gone off to Bordeaux. And all the time nothing to do but read the papers, which he couldn't believe, and listen to the click of Annette's needles. And then came the news of the battle of the Marne, and he could breathe again.

He breathed freely—he had gone weeks, it seemed to him, without taking a deep breath. People were saying it was the beginning of the end, and the Ālliēs—he himself had always called it Ălliēs—and why not?—would soon be in Germany now. He wanted to believe this so much, that he said he didn't believe a word of it, much as when, the weather looking fine, he would take his umbrella to make sure. And then,

forsooth, they went and dug themselves in! This beginning of warfare which was to last four years produced but moderate premonition in his mind. There was a certain relief in the immobility of things after the plunging excitement of Mons and the Marne. He continued to read the papers, shake his head, and invest in War Loan. His nephew Benedict was training for a commission in Kitchener's army; Cicely's boy, also, had joined up, as they called it. He supposed they had to. Annette had said several times that she wanted to go to France and be a nurse. It was all her fancy. She could do much more good by knitting and being economical.

Presently he took Fleur down to her school in the West; and not much too early, for the Zeppelins became busy soon after. In regard to their exploits, he displayed a somewhat natural perversity, for though he had taken his daughter down to a remote region to avoid them, he thought people made much too much fuss about them altogether. From a top window in his club he was privileged to see one of them burst into flames. He said nothing and was glad of it afterwards —some of his fellow-members had shown their feel-

ings, and those not all they should be. There was provocation, no doubt; but, after all, the crew were being burned alive. Generally speaking, while the war dragged on, the reality of it was kept from him most efficiently, not only by the Government, the papers, and his age, but by a sort of barrage put up by himself from within himself. There the thing was, and what was the use of making more of it than he absolutely had to? If one ever came to the end, one might indulge one's feelings, perhaps. And always the doings at sea, the adventures and misadventures of ships, impinged on him with a poignancy absent from the events on land. Of all that happened in the early part of the war, the bombardment of Scarborough affected him, perhaps, most painfully. It was like a half-arm jab above the heart. His pride was stunned. The notion that ships had dared to come so near as to throw shells into English houses and not been sunk for doing it, was peculiarly horrible to him. What would they be doing next? He had a continual longing for something definite at sea, some sign there of British superiority, as if 'Rule, Britannia!' had got into the composition of his blood. The sinking of the *Lusitania* gave

him at first much the same shock that it gave everyone else, but when he heard people abusing the Americans for not declaring war at once, he felt that they were extravagant. The Americans were a long way off—to talk about their being in danger was as good as saying that England was going to be defeated; which, curiously, considering his constitutional apprehensiveness, Soames never could believe. He had a sort of deep feeling, indeed, that he did not want to be rescued by America or anybody else. But these feelings were curiously mixed up with another feeling that if England had, like America, lost a lot of English people drowned like that, she would have gone to war like a shot, and with his approval, into the bargain.

Early in 1915, owing to depletion of the office staff, he had gone back into regular harness at Cuthcott Kingson and Forsyte's. He worked there, harder than he had ever worked. In view of national anxieties the legal issues he was dealing with often seemed to him 'petty,' but he dealt with them conscientiously; they took his mind off, and incidentally gave him more money to invest in War Loan. After the second battle of Ypres, he had contributed an ambulance, and

had the exquisite discomfort of seeing his name in the papers. When in the train, going up and down, or at lunch-time in his City club, he listened to elderly wiseacres discussing the conduct of the war, the nature of Germans, politicians, Americans, and other reprehensible characters, he would look exactly as if he were going to sniff.

'What do they know about it,' he would think, 'talking through their hats like that—it's un-English.' There was so much in those days that was hysterical and 'un-English'; the papers encouraged it with their 'intern-the-Hun' and other 'stunts,' as they called it nowadays. If ever there were a time when mouths required shutting, it was now; and there they were, spluttering and bawling all over the place.

In these ways, then, nearly two years passed before, in his paper that June morning, he read the first official account of the Battle of Jutland. Taking the journal in his hand so that no one else should see it till he himself had recovered, he passed out of the drawing-room window on to the dewy lawn, and walked blindly towards the river. There was a sinking sensation in

the pit of his stomach. Standing there bareheaded in the sunshine and the peace of leaves and water, with birds all round as if nothing had happened, he tried to get hold of himself. Almost a sense of panic he had. A real battle at last, and all those losses! Under a poplar tree he read the account again. The sting was in the head of it; the tail was all right. Why couldn't they have reversed the order and begun with the fact that the Germans had run for home? What had possessed them to make him feel so bad? It was a victory even if we *had* lost all those ships. A blundering lot—to make the worst of it like that. It was like being shot by your own side. Tell the truth—yes; but not so as to give one a stomach-ache, where there was no need for it. He went back to breakfast with his jaw set.

"There's been a big battle at sea," he said to Annette; "we lost a lot of ships, but the Germans cut and ran for it. I shouldn't be surprised if they never come out in full force again." Thus out of instinctive perversity did he foretell the future.

The rest of the day and the day after, further reports confirmed his resentment with the authorities for making him suffer like that. What on earth had

they been about? They kept all sorts of things from you, and then when they had what really amounted to good news, blurted it out as if it were a disaster.

The death of Kitchener a few days later, though lowering to his temperature, had not the same staggering effect. He had done a lot for the country, and looked like a lion in a zoo, but in the ebb and flow of world events even his great figure seemed small.

Towards the end of 1916 he had a curious little personal experience which affected him more than he would have admitted, so that he never mentioned it. This was in the train going up to London. From patriotic motives he was at that time travelling third, but on this particular morning, the train being full, he got into a first-class compartment, occupied by a young officer in uniform with his military kit in the rack above, and a pretty young woman whose eyes were red. From behind his paper Soames felt that if they were not married they ought to be, for they were mutually occupied with each other's eyes and hands and lips. At stations where their occupation had to cease he observed them round his nose. The pallid desperation of the young man's face and the look in the girl's

reddened eyes gave him definite discomfort. Here was a case of impending separation, with all the tragic foreboding, and utter grief of war-time partings such as were taking place millionfold all over the world. It was the first Soames had seen, close up, and far more painful than he had realised. They were locked in a desperate embrace when the train ran into Westbourne Park. The girl was evidently to get out here, and seemed incapable of doing so. She stood swaying with the tears running down her face. The young officer wrenched the door open and almost pushed her out. Her face, looking up from the platform, was so intensely wretched that it made Soames sore. The train moved on, the young officer flung himself back into his corner with a groan. Soames looked out of the opposite window. For a whole minute even after the train had reached Paddington, he continued to gaze in at a deserted carriage alongside. At last, grasping his umbrella, he evacuated the now empty compartment and getting into a taxi, uttered the word 'Poultry' in a gruff voice. He was gruff all day. All over the world it was like that—a shocking business. And yet, by now, people seemed more concerned about their

sugar and butter rations than about the war itself. Air-raids, ships being sunk, and what they could get to eat, were all people thought about—except of course, dancing in night clubs and making up their faces. In all his life he had never seen so many made-up faces as he saw now. In coming from the office late and passing down the Strand, every woman he met seemed like the street women he used to see in his younger days. Paint and powder, with khaki alongside.

And so 1917 went by, and Fleur was getting a big girl. He had good reports of her—she was quick at lessons and games; it was some comfort. At her school down in the West, he gathered, they heard and saw very little of the war; and in the holidays he kept her at home as much as he could. There were few signs of war at Mapledurham, though of course khaki was everywhere. When conscription came in, Soames had shaken his head. He didn't know what the newspapers were about. The thing was un-English. Once it was introduced, however, he supposed it was the only thing. All the same, he never approved of the way they bullied those conscientious objectors. He had no sympathy with the fellows' consciences, of

course, but the idea of harassing your fellow-countrymen at a time like this, repelled him; all his native individualism, too, remained in secret revolt against the slave-driving which had become the everyday procedure of abominable times. He had lost two gardeners in the opening year, and now they took the other two and left him with an old man and a boy, so that he often took a spade and dug up weeds himself; while Annette killed slugs with a French mixture. In the house he had never had anything but maids, so that they couldn't take the butler he hadn't got, which was some consolation. But if he'd had a car, they'd have taken his chauffeur. He felt he could have lost the lot with composure, if they'd gone of their own free will, but he would not have urged their going. Some reticent, secret belief in the sanctity of private feelings, even feelings about the country, would have prevented him. They had a right, he supposed, to their own ideas about things. If he, himself, had been under forty, he supposed he would have gone—though the mere notion gave him a pain below the ribs, so crude, so brutal, and so empty did all this military business appear to him; but he was not prepared

to tell anybody else to go. His retention of this kind of delicacy made him lonelier than ever in the city, in the club and in trains, where most people seemed prepared to tell anybody to do anything. Soames himself was almost ashamed of it; after all, you couldn't carry on a war without ordering people about. And he tried to conduct himself so that people shouldn't suspect him of this weakness. But on one occasion it led him into a serious tiff with his cousin George Forsyte at the 'Iseeum' Club. George, just a year younger than himself, had, it appeared, gone in for recruiting down in Hampshire; while spending the weekends in town 'to enjoy the air-raids,' as he put it. Soames suspected him of enjoying something else, besides. Catching sight of George, then, one Saturday afternoon, sitting in the bow window of the 'Iseeum,' Soames had inadvertently returned his greeting and was beckoned up.

"Have a drink?" said George. "No? Some tea, then; you can have my sugar."

His japing, heavy-lidded eyes took Soames in from top to toe.

"You're thin as a lath," he said. "What are you doing—breeding for the country?"

Soames drew up the corner of his lip.

"That's not funny," he said tartly. "What are *you* doing?"

"Getting chaps killed. You'd better take to it too. The blighters want driving, now."

"Thank you," said Soames; "not in my line."

George grinned.

"Too squeamish?"

"If you like."

"What's your general game, then?"

"Minding my own business," said Soames.

"Making the wills, eh?"

Soames put his cup down and took his hat up. He had never disliked George more than at that moment.

"Don't get your shirt out," said George; "somebody must make the wills. You might make mine, by the way—equal shares to Roger, Eustace and Francie. Executors yourself and Eustace. Come and do an air-raid with me one night. Did you see that St. John Hayman's boy was killed? They say the Huns are preparing a big push for the spring."

Soames shrugged.

"Good-bye," he said; "I'll send you a draft of your will."

"Pitch it short," said George, "and have me roasted. No bones by request."

Soames nodded, and went out.

A big push! Would they never tire of making mincemeat of the world? He had often been tempted towards the Lansdowne attitude; but some essential bulldog within him had always stirred and growled. An end that was no end—after all this, it wouldn't do. Hold on—until! For never, even at the worst moments, had he believed that England could be beaten.

In March, 1918, he had been laid up at Mapledurham with a chill and was only just out again, when the big German 'push' began. It came with a suddenness that shook him to the marrow, and induced the usual longing to get away somewhere by himself. He went up rather slowly on to a bit of commonland, and sat down on his overcoat among gorse bushes. It was peaceful and smelled of spring; a lark was singing. And out there the Germans were breaking through! A sort of prayer went up from him while he sat in the

utter peace of the mild day. He had heard so many times that we were ready for it, and now we weren't, it seemed. Always the way—too cocksure. He sat listening, as if—as if one could hear the guns all that way off. The man down at the lock was reported to have heard them once. All me eye—you couldn't. Couldn't you? Wasn't that———? Nonsense! He lay back and put his ear to the ground, but only the whisper of a very gentle wind came to him, and the hum of a wild bee wending to some blossom of the gorse. A better sound than that of guns. And then the first chime of the village church bell tingled his ears. There they would soon be sitting and kneeling and thinking about the break-through, and the parson would offer up a special prayer for the destruction of Germans—he shouldn't wonder. Well, it was destroy or be destroyed—it all came back to that. Funny thing! Life lived on life, or rather on death. According to the latest information, all matter was alive, and every shape lived on some other shape, or at least on the elements of shape. The earth was nothing but disintegrated shape, out of which came more shapes and you ate them, and then you disintegrated and gave rise to shapes, and

somebody ate them, and so it went on. In spite of the break-through, he could not help being glad to be alive after a fortnight cooped up in the house. His sense of smell, too, so long confined to eau-de-cologne, was very keen this morning; he could smell the gorse —a scent more delicate than most, 'the scent of gorse far-blown from distant hill,' he had read somewhere. And to think that out there his countrymen were struggling and dying, and being blown to smithereens—young fellows, from his office, from his garden, from every English office and garden, to save England—to save the world, they said—but that was flim-flam. And, perhaps, after all these horrible four years they wouldn't save England. Drawing his thin legs under him, he sat staring down towards the river where his home lay. Yes, they would save her, if it meant putting another ten years on to the conscription age, or taking the age limit off altogether. England under a foreigner? Not for Joe! He scrabbled with his hand, brought up a fistful of earth, and mechanically put it to his nose. It smelled exactly as it should smell—of earth, and gave him ever so queer and special a sensation. English earth, H'm! Earth

was earth, whether in England or in Timbuctoo. Funny to give your life for what smelled exactly like his mushroom house. You put a name to a thing and you died for it. There was a lark singing—very English bird, cheery and absent-minded, singing away without knowing a thing about anything and caring less, he supposed. The bell had ceased to toll for service. If people thought God was particularly interested in England, they were mistaken. He wouldn't do a thing about it. People had to do things for themselves, and if they didn't, that was the end. Take those submarines. Leave them to God and see what happened —one would be eating one's fantails before one could say Jack Robinson.

The mild air and a slant of March sunlight gently warmed his cheek pale from too much contact with a pillow. And—out there! If ever this thing ended, he would come up here again and see what it was like without an ache under his fifth rib. A nice spot—open and high. And now he would have to get back to the house and they would give him chicken broth, and he would have to listen to Annette saying that the English never saw an inch before their noses—which

as a fact they didn't—and tell her that they did. A weary business when you felt as he felt about this news. He rose. Twelve o'clock! They'd have finished praying now and got to the sermon. He pitied that parson, preaching about smiting the Philistines, he shouldn't wonder. There were the jawbones of asses about, plenty, but not a Samson among the lot of them. The gorse—it was early—looked pretty, blooming round him—when the gorse was out of bloom, kissing was out of fashion. He wondered idly what had to go out of bloom before killing was out of fashion. There went a hawk! He stood and watched it hover and swoop sideways, and the red glint of it, till again it rested hovering in the air; then slowly in the pale sunlight he wended his way down towards the river.

CHAPTER IV

July came. The 'break-through' had long been checked, the fronts repaired, the Americans had come over in great numbers, Foch was in supreme command. Soames didn't know—perhaps it was necessary, but Annette's undisguised relief was unpleasant to him, and so far as he could see, things were going on as interminably as before. It was to Winifred that he spoke the words which definitely changed the fortunes of the world.

"We shall never win," he said, "I despair of it. The men are all right, but leaders! There isn't one among the lot—I despair of it." No one had ever heard him talk like that before, or use such a final word. The morning papers on the following day were buoyant with the news that the German offensive against the French had been stopped and that the French and Americans had broken through. From that day on, the Allies, as Soames still called them, never looked back.

Those interested in such questions will pause, perhaps to consider whether Soames—like so many other

people—really won the war, or whether it was that in him some hidden sensibility received in advance of the newspapers the impact of events and put up the instantaneous contradiction natural from one so individualistic. Whichever is true, the relief he felt at having his dictum contradicted was extraordinary. For the first time in three years he spent the following Sunday afternoon in his picture gallery. The French were advancing, the English were waiting to advance; the Americans were doing well; the air-raids had ceased; the submarines were beaten. And it all seemed to have happened in two days. While he stood looking at his Goya and turning over photographs of pictures in the Prado, a notion came to him. In that painting of Goya's called 'La Vendimia,' the girl with the basket on her head reminded him of Fleur. There was really quite a resemblance. If the war ever stopped, he would commission an artist to make him a copy of that Goya girl —the colouring, if he remembered rightly, was very agreeable. It would remind him of pleasant things—his daughter and his visit to the Prado before he bought Lord Burlingford's 'Goya' in 1910. A notion so utterly unconnected with the war had not occurred to

him for years—it was almost like a blessing, with its suggestion of life apart from battle and murder, and once more connected with Dumetrius. And ringing the bell, he ordered a jug of claret cup. He drank very little of it, but it gave him a feeling that was almost Victorian. What had that fellow Jolyon, and Irene, done with themselves all these war years? Had they sweated in their shoes and lost weight as he had done —he hoped so! Their boy, if he remembered, would be of military age next year; for the thousandth time he was glad that Fleur had disappointed him and been a girl. That day was, on the whole, the happiest he had spent since he bought his James Maris in July, 1914. . . .

He began now to put on weight slowly, for though the battles went on, anxious and bloody, the movement was always in the right direction, of which he had despaired just in time. The enemy was caving-in; the Bulgarians, the Turks, soon the Austrians would go—they said. And all the time the Americans were swarming over. Soames met their officers in London on his way to and from the City. They wore khaki with high collars and sometimes pince-nez—they

must feel very uncomfortable; but they seemed in good spirits and had everything money could buy—which was the great thing. He often thought what he would do when the end came. Some men would get drunk, he supposed; others would lose their heads and probably their hats; but so far as he could see, there didn't seem to be any adequate way of expressing what he himself would feel. He thought of Brighton, and of fishing from a punt; he thought of taking train down to Fleur's school and taking train back; he thought of standing in a crowd opposite Downing Street, as he had stood when the thing began. Nothing seemed satisfactory. Then the Austrians gave up. Somehow he had never thought that he had actually been at war with the Austrians—they were an amiable lot, with too many archdukes. And now that they were down and out, and the archdukes done with, he felt quite sorry for them. People were saying it had become a question of days. Soames didn't know. The Germans always seemed to have something up their sleeves. They had been marvellous fighters—no good saying they hadn't—in fact, they had fought too well altogether. He shouldn't be surprised if they tried to de-

stroy London at the last minute. And with unconscious perversity he took up his quarters with Winifred in Green Street. On the 9th of November he had his sixty-fourth birthday there—fortunately no one remembered it; he never could bear receiving presents and being wished many happy returns, such nonsense! Everybody was sure now that it was all over bar the shouting. Soames, however, said: "You mark my words—they'll try a big air-raid before they finish." Terms for an armistice were being prepared, it was rumoured that they would be signed at any moment. Soames shook his head. He was sufficiently in two minds, however, not to go to the City on the 11th of November, and was seated in the dining-room at Green Street, when there came the sound of maroons which always preluded an air-raid. What had he told them? It would be a quarter of an hour or more before the raid began. He would put his nose out, and see what they were up to. The street was empty but for an old woman—charlady she seemed to be—standing with a duster in her hand on the doorstep of the next house. Soames was struck by her face. It wore a smile such as a poet might have called ecstatic. She waved

her duster at him, and then—most peculiar—began to wipe her eyes with it. Sound rolled into the street from Park Lane—cheering, gusts of it, waves of cheering. Soames saw other people rushing out of houses. One of them threw his hat down and danced on it. It couldn't be an air-raid then—no man would do that for an air-raid. Why! Why—of course—it was the Armistice! *At last!* And very quietly, trembling all over, Soames muttered: "Thank God!" For a moment he was tempted to hurry down towards Park Lane whence the sound of cheering came. Then, suddenly, the idea seemed to him vulgar. He walked back into the house and slammed the door. Going into the dining-room, he sat down in an armchair which had its back to everything. He sat there without movement except that he breathed as if he had been running. His lips kept quivering. It was queer. And then—he never admitted it to a soul—tears ran out of his eyes and rolled on to his stiff collar. He would not have believed them possible and he let them roll. The long, long Thing—it was over. All over! Then suddenly, feeling that if he didn't take care he would have to change his collar, he took out his pocket handkerchief.

This confession of his emotion acted like a charm. The moisture ceased, and, removing all trace of it, he leaned back with eyes closed. For some time he stayed like that, as if at the end of a long day's work. The clamour of bells and rejoicing penetrated the closed room, but Soames sat with his head sunk on his chest, still quivering all over. It was as if age-long repression of his feelings were taking revenge in this long, relaxed, quivering immobility. Out there, they would be dancing and shouting; laughing and drinking; praying and weeping. And Soames sat and quivered.

He got up at last and, going to the sideboard, helped himself to a glass of his dead father's old brown sherry. Then taking his overcoat and umbrella, he went out—he didn't know why, or whither.

He walked through quiet streets towards Piccadilly. When he passed people they smiled at him, and he didn't like it—having to smile back. Some seemed to toss remarks at the air as they passed—talking to themselves, or to God, or what not. Every now and then somebody ran. He reached Piccadilly and didn't like it either—full of lorries and omnibuses crowded with people all cheering and behaving like fools. He

crossed it, as quickly as possible, and went down through the Green Park, past the crowds in front of Buckingham Palace. He walked on to the Abbey and the Houses of Parliament—crowds there—crowds everywhere. He skirted them and kept on along the Embankment—he didn't know why and he didn't know where. From Blackfriars he moved up City-wards and reached Ludgate Hill. And suddenly he knew where he was going—St. Paul's. There stood the dome, curved massive against the grey November sky, huge above the stir of flags and traffic, silent in the din of cheering and of bells. He walked up the steps and went in. He hadn't been since the war began, and his visit now had no connection with God. He went because it was big and old and empty, and English, and because it reminded him. He walked up the aisle and stood looking at the roof of the dome. Christopher Wren! Good old English name. Good old quiet English stones and bones. No more sudden death, no more bombs, no more drowning ships, no more poor young devils taken from home and killed. Peace! He stood with his hands folded on the handle of his umbrella and his left knee flexed as if standing

at ease; on his restrained pale face upturned was a look wistful and sardonic. Rivers of blood and tears. Why? A gleam of colour caught his eye. Flags! They couldn't do without them even here. The Flag! Terrible thing—sublime and terrible—the Flag!

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